

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of the February 9, 2011 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Room 4 of the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA.

1. Introductions – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

Laura Wiener, Chair and representative of Arlington, called the meeting to order at 3:05 PM. Members, guests, visitors, and staff introduced themselves (see the attached attendance list).

2. Chair's Report – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

John Kane, the Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA's (AACT's) representative to the Advisory Council passed away last week. He was a school teacher before becoming involved with the AACT. He was well liked, well respected, and will be missed.

L. Wiener attended a conference call with Captain Jeff Flumignan, the director of the North Atlantic Gateway Office for the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Division. The participants discussed ports and using short sea shipping to reduce congestion on Interstate 95 by diverting freight from trucks to water. Massport also participated in the call and discussed the economic challenges of short sea shipping. The Massport representative said short sea shipping services from New York and Halifax, Nova Scotia were not economically viable without an operating subsidy.

L. Wiener also reported that the Freight Committee's role will be changing. The Long-Range Transportation Plan is being developed and the Freight Committee's attention is needed on the MPO's work. They had a productive meeting today to discuss and make recommendations on the freight needs for the Long-Range Transportation Plan.

3. Approval of the Meeting Minutes December 8, 2010 – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

A motion to approve the draft minutes of December 8, 2010 was made and seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.

4. Presentation of the Draft Transportation Needs Assessment – *Anne McGahan, Plan Manager, Boston Region MPO staff*

The Long-Range Transportation Plan must be developed every four years. It sets a vision for the future transportation system and policies to achieve the vision. It must include projects that cost more than \$10 million and projects that add capacity to the system. The Plan must also be financially constrained.

Staff recently completed a draft transportation needs assessment. The MPO decided to conduct a needs assessment so that they had a firm grasp on the region's needs before deciding on a set of projects and programs to address the needs.

The region was studied in six radial corridors (developed around major transportation facilities), the Central Area, and the Interstate 495 and Route 128 circumferential corridors. The chapter on each corridor follows a similar format. There are descriptions of the existing transportation facilities, demographics, travel characteristics within and between the corridors, and identified transportation issues. The end of each chapter includes a summary. There will also be a final chapter that describes the region's top priorities.

Staff plans to update the needs assessment annually. The MPO is seeking public feedback in February.

A. McGahan went over the Plan schedule. Public meetings are scheduled in February to discuss the needs assessment. Staff will soon develop the universe of projects and programs. The MPO will eventually use the list to select projects and programs. A base transportation network is being developed by the MPO's modeling staff. Eventually the MPO-identified set (or sets) of projects will be compared to the base scenario using the model to examine the differences. The Plan will be released for public review and comment in June and is scheduled to be adopted by the MPO in August.

Member Comments

- The inventory is useful. There is a lot of information included. Prioritization of the needs will be helpful. (Chris Porter, MassBike)
- Freight needs are simplified. There should be more information on supply chains and distribution. The needs assessment should explain that the 286,000 pound weight limit on rail constrains demand for freight rail service. The 263,000 pound limit, set by MBTA policy, is obsolete. Shippers and receivers are receiving box cars that are 15% below their capacity because of the weight limits. The needs assessment should describe in more detail how the movement of terminal facilities to Worcester and Ayer will impact the region's highways. (Frank DeMasi, Wellesley)
- Privately funded projects and services are not well identified in the needs assessment. The private bus carriers fill some of the gaps in the public transportation system. (Chris Anzuoni, Mass Bus Association)
- The document is large and difficult to digest. A summary that prioritizes the needs will be helpful. (L. Wiener)
- All transportation needs should be listed, even those not within the MPO's purview. (Steve Olanoff, Westwood)
- The cost-benefit analyses from the MassDOT Freight Plan should be described in the needs assessment. (John McQueen, WalkBoston)
- The Massachusetts Freight Plan predicted a 70% increase in freight tonnage in Massachusetts. The Freight Committee is concerned about the increase. There is a need for empirical data about how it will affect the region. The data is needed

- regardless of who collects and uses it. (Richard Flynn, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition)
- The Rail and Freight Plan did not discuss the freight network in the Boston region in much detail. The Framingham Secondary track, which connects the South Coast to the national rail network, carries more than 5,000 car loads per year. However, the line cannot accommodate 286,000 pound railcars. There is latent demand for moving freight east of Worcester and Ayer. (F. DeMasi)
 - MassDOT seems to have an informal objective to reduce automobile use and increase the use of other modes. A summary subsection outlining the impediments to mode shift should be included. (J. McQueen)

Member Questions

In response to members' comments and questions, A. McGahan made the following additional comments:

- Staff is developing a universe of projects that will be presented in a table. The subset of projects that meet an identified need will be evaluated against the MPO's visions and their consistency with the policies.
- The services of the regional transit authorities (RTAs) are outlined and mapped in the existing services portion of each corridor.
- The Metropolitan Area Planning Council provided information on major land use developments in the region and the demographic projections. They contacted each of the cities and towns to identify the developments.
- There are many freight issues that are statewide issues and transcend the MPO boundary. The freight issues can be brought before the MPO so people are aware of them. Many of the freight projects and issues identified in the State Freight Plan are outside of the MPO area, but still affect the Boston region.
- The final summary chapter will be posted on the MPO's website on February 11.
- The MPO will discuss how to allocate the available funding between preservation and expansion. The MPO will discuss priorities before receiving financial data.
- The maintenance needs of the existing system far outweigh the financial resources the MPO expects to have available.

5. Freight Committee Views of Regional Freight Needs – *Walter Bonin, Co-Chair of the Advisory Council's Freight Committee; and Richard Flynn of the Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition*

W. Bonin said the Freight Committee voted to endorse the Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition's letter about the region's freight needs. The letter sets the freight context for the Advisory Council. W. Bonin then gave a presentation on the transportation opportunities and challenges facing the region. Key points were:

- The state has several strengths including a great university system and a well-educated workforce, world class medical centers, high-tech companies, major financial companies. Massachusetts is an attractive place to live and work.
- However, the transportation system is at capacity.
- Using important rail right-of-ways could help reduce highway congestion and encourage smart growth, but now, they are not viewed as important assets.

- Truck traffic is expected to grow rapidly, further exacerbating congestion.
- Local zoning does not support the necessary higher density and industrial development along rail corridors.
- Industrial property is not viewed as an asset that can create jobs.
- The state's default policy is to divert freight from rail to trucks.
- More transportation corridors are unlikely to develop, so the existing ones must be optimally developed.
- A freight plan that protects and incorporates all rail and industrial assets is a need.
- Barriers to transit oriented development should be removed, and irreplaceable rail assets should be preserved and used.

R. Flynn discussed the views of the Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition, which were outlined in their letter. Several people with an understanding of the rail industry and the freight needs of Eastern Massachusetts worked on the letter. Among the people that participated were members of the shipping community, consultants, engineers, private citizens, and transportation providers. The letter provides input to the Long-Range Transportation Plan. Additionally, the state's Joint Committee on Ways and Means, which is putting a bond bill together, asked for input. Also, the letter provides input to MassDOT's gap group, which is looking at needs from the State Freight Plan.

R. Flynn encouraged Advisory Council members to review the last page of the letter, which discusses why freight rail is important in the Boston region. The middle section recommends ideas for the Long-Range Transportation Plan. The EMFRC hopes the letter will stimulate action by the Advisory Council and its members.

Member Comments

- The development of the highway system shifted freight to trucks. The public and political leaders are not fully aware of this. There needs to be an education and selling process about this problem. Rail is also a passenger transportation solution (Chan Rogers, SouthWest Advisory Planning Committee).
- Reducing the number of trucks on the roads is broadly supported. However, studies in Massachusetts and elsewhere in the country are skeptical of the potential to divert freight from trucks to rail. Commodities that can be shifted to rail are less time sensitive, while time sensitive goods typically move by truck. It's difficult to make freight rail competitive, even if the rail system is improved. It would be helpful to see examples of specific types of commodity movements in order to demonstrate that there is a market for more freight rail movement, and how the improvements you proposed would stimulate that. (C. Porter)
- In response to C. Porter's comment, D. Flynn agreed that more data are needed. D. Flynn does not support moving freight to rail unless it's economical. MassDOT highlighted a projected 70 percent increase in freight volume, but did not address how it may be accommodated.
- The Pioneer Valley Railroad shows that short line railroads in Massachusetts can grow the economy and create good jobs. (Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association)

- L. Wiener thanked the Freight Committee and the Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition for their work on the letter. The Plan Committee is meeting next Thursday to develop a comment letter on the draft needs assessment.

6. FFYs 2012-2015 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Development Update – Monica Tibbits, TIP Committee Chair

The TIP Committee met on Friday, January 28 to review and discuss the MPO's new TIP evaluation criteria and development process. The Committee members made the following comments:

- Cities and towns should be rewarded for cooperating with each other. The MPO's job is to think regionally and it should reward projects that have regional support and cooperation by giving them additional points when they are evaluated. This would advance the Advisory Council's priority of regional benefit.
- Considering the financial constraint, projects should also be evaluated on cost effectiveness. For instance, projects could be compared based on the cost per minute of delay the project will reduce. It was argued that this measure would favor large highway expansion projects.
- The new TIP development process, which will establish a list of projects expected to receive funds and a first tier of projects that can replace a project in the TIP if it can't be made ready, will give project proponents a better sense of the likelihood of receiving federal funds.
- It would be easier for the public to understand project evaluations if the projects were evaluated on a scoring system with a 0 to 100 scale.
- Modal split balance should be evaluated based on the mix of projects in the entire TIP. It may be difficult to evaluate how well a single project promotes it.

7. Committee Reports

There were none.

8. Announcements

There were none.

9. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 PM.

Attachments:

1. Attendance List for February 9, 2011

ATTACHMENT 1: Attendance List for February 9, 2011

Cities and Towns

Laura Wiener, Arlington
Tom Kadzis, Boston
Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Dom D'Eramo, Millis
Kurt Mullen, Needham
Jack Gillon, Quincy
Jon Squibb, Revere
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Agencies

Tad Read, Boston Redevelopment Authority
Karen Pearson, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Steven Rawding, MassDOT – Aeronautics Division
Donna Smallwood, MassRIDES
Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP)
Adam Recchia, Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District

Citizen Groups

Thomas Daley, American Council of Engineering Companies
Schuyler Larrabee, Boston Society of Architects
Malek Al-Khatib, Boston Society of Civil Engineers
Richard Flynn, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition
Chris Anzuoni, Massachusetts Bus Association
Jillian Zywiec, Massachusetts Motor Transportation Association
Chris Porter, MassBike
Tom Yardley, MASCO
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association
Monica Tibbits, Route 128 Business Council
John McQueen, WalkBoston

Guests and Visitors

Jo Hart, Worcester resident
Ed Lowney, Malden resident
Marilyn McNab, Boston resident

MPO Staff

Walter Bennett, Mike Callahan, Anne McGahan, Hayes Morrison, and Pam Wolfe